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CHRISTMAS EVE.



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THE GOLD FLEECE



THE GOLD PIECE.

CHRISTMAS EVE,

AND

OTHER STORIES.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN,

BY CHARLES A. DANA.



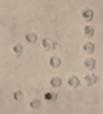
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STORIES.

CHRISTMAS EVE.



VENING had come over the earth, the sacred eve of Christmas, and a poor woman was sitting with her two children in a little room of a small house in the suburbs. The father of the children had died after having been ill for a long time, during which he had earned nothing, so that he had left his family in extreme poverty.

The mother too was unable to earn any thing, for she had to stay with the youngest child and nurse it, and take care of it, because it was ill all the time. Now the poor mother was sitting crying to herself, for she had no wood to warm the room, and on that day when all others were rejoicing and parents every where were lighting up Christmas trees*

*For the information of my little readers I will say that in Germany, Christmas Eve is a great festival in every family, especially for the children. For them the parents prepare a Christmas Tree, generally a young pine, which is hung all over with gilt apples and nuts, strings of raisins and almonds, and choice confectionary, all of which glitter beautifully in the light of very many small colored wax tapers, which are placed among the dark twigs of the pine, while at its foot the children find their presents. They take great pleasure in gathering around the tree, admiring its beauty and dancing in their joy. As long as the tapers are burning in all their glory, and the gilt apples and sugar toys are glittering they hardly look at their beautiful

for their children, she had to sit in the darkness, because the last drop of oil in the lamp was burned up. When the elder boy heard his mother sobbing, he threw his arms around her neck and said: "Oh, mother, if we only had a light! If I could only see you! I believe I should not be so cold, and you would not cry so any more if you could see us." At this the poor woman almost broke her heart with grief; then she put her hand in her pocket and said: "Go, my child, and get some oil; here is my last penny, I meant to have bought bread with it to-morrow, but who knows

presents. Of course they take great pains to please their parents all the year round, lest they should lose the benefit of a fine Christmas Tree, for only good children have a Christmas Tree.

but the holy Christ may give us bread in some other way." The boy took the money and ran to get some oil, and as he went he looked to the right and left to see if there were any where a window illuminated with the lights of a Christmas tree. But only poor people lived in that street, and most of the houses were dark; but here and there a faint oil lamp shone through a small and dim window pane.

The boy went farther and farther till he reached the broad street full of stores, all lighted up with splendor. In the tall houses there lived rich families, and at the large windows Christmas trees were shining brilliantly. Finally he came to the market-place where booth stood next

to booth, and he could not enough wonder at all the magnificent things exposed for sale, the sweetmeats, the painted toys, and the brilliant Christmas trees. He went about here and there, looked at one thing after another, and was so happy that he did not feel that his hands and feet were growing numb with cold. At last he came to a booth which was lighted up more finely than any of the others, and a great many people were crowded together before it; as he looked in, he forgot every thing else, for there he saw all that his mother had told him so often about the holy Christ wrought finely and beautifully in wax. The Virgin Mary was sitting in a stable holding the infant Christ on her lap; and before

her the shepherds were kneeling, worshipping the holy child, and all around were cows and sheep, and above the child were waxen angels with silver wings. The boy had never seen anything so beautiful, and I don't know how long he would have stood gazing at it if a crowd of new comers had not pushed him aside. Then he suddenly remembered that his mother was sitting in the dark at home with his little sister, and that he had come out to get some oil. But how he was frightened when he felt that the penny had fallen out of his benumbed hand. He began to weep aloud, but though the crowd around him were constantly going into the booth to buy things, and carrying the beautiful arti-

cles they had bought past him as they went out, no one asked what was the matter, and he remained unnoticed in his grief. Then he went slowly back through the lighted street, but now he looked neither to the right nor the left, for he no longer took pleasure in any thing. At last he came into the dark street where his mother lived. And as he thought how sad his mother would be about the lost penny, he could not make up his mind to go home, but sat down on a great stone and wept bitterly.

“Ah,” thought he, “the Christ Child to-day brings gladness to all, and only leaves mother and me more unhappy than ever.” So he sat a great while till

at last he heard the watchman on the corner calling the hour; he came down the street with his lantern and sung:

“In the sacred, silent night,
Christ, the Lord, came down from Heaven;
Peace to us he brought, and joy
To every pious soul hath given.”

Then, by the light of the lantern, the boy saw something shining on the snow before him, and picked it up to play with. But the watchman came up and asked why he sat there in the street in the dark and cold and did not go home. In tears the child told how he had lost his mother's last penny, with which he had gone to get oil; how his mother had wept all the time since his father had died, and how he could not bear to see her

grieve for her last penny. "Well, come with me," said the kindly watchman, "I will give you some oil, and then you must run home quickly, for your mother will be troubled about you. And as he took the child by the hand he felt something hard and asked what it was. The child showed him the shining thing he had just found in the snow. "There," said the watchman, "see what the holy Christ has sent you! That is a gold piece; for a gold piece you can get more than a handful of pennies. Now your mother can buy bread and wood to-morrow." At this the boy was full of delight, and after he had got the oil of the watchman he ran home to his mother and told her every thing that had happened, how he had

lost the penny and found the gold piece. Then the mother wept but it was for joy, and she took her children on her lap and taught them to thank the holy Christ child because he had remembered their poverty and made them so rich.





THE COCKEREL AND THE HENS.

THERE was once a great farm-yard, in which there lived a splendid looking cockerel with his wives, a whole pack of hens, black and white, grey and brown, both

with and without crests. They all lived in great peace and harmony, for every thing went well with them, and every day they got a large pile of barley corns for their food. Only one thing troubled them, that their eggs were always taken away and they many times could bring up a brood of chickens. The hens had often hid their nests, sometimes in the woodshed, sometimes in the barn, so that the eggs might not be found, and once they had saved up a mountain of eggs. But the girl who fed them found their egg mountain and carried it to the city and sold it.

Indeed it was no more than natural that the eggs should be found, for as soon as a hen laid one, she set up such

a noisy cackling that it was heard in the farthest corner of the farm-yard, and all the hens came running together to look at the wonder. Some boasted how white it was, others praised its beautiful shape, and others disputed whether it would hatch a pullet or a cockerel. About this the hens very often fell into a quarrel, so that at last there was such a chattering, that all the servant-maid had to do was to go where the noise was in order to be sure of finding the eggs.

The old cockerel was troubled at the loss of the eggs quite as much as the hens, if not more. One day after he had been walking up and down thinking, in a corner of the farm-yard, he flew upon the edge of the watering trough, shut his

eyes, and crowed a loud and piercing "cock-a-doodle-doo." So at this well-known call, the hens came rushing and tumbling from all sides and formed a clucking assembly around the cockerel. Then, although he was much agitated and troubled in his mind, he made a very strong speech to the meeting, and told the hens that he knew perfectly well how often they had to mourn over the loss of their eggs, and that after long reflection he could think of no better advice than to leave the farm-yard and go off into the woods. If they were willing to do this they should get up early the next day. A loud clucking announced their assent to this proposition, and all of them went rather earlier than usual to roost, so that

they might get a good sleep before starting. The next morning the cockerel waked up his wives with a sort of low crowing, and they started in perfect silence out of the farm-yard. But as the last of the hens left the yard, he flew upon the gate and crowed an exulting "Cock-a-doodle-doo," and then all went on further and further till they got into the woods. There they made a great nest in a thicket for their eggs, and at night they roosted on the trees. For a while they got on pretty well, only the hens cackled so loud when they laid their eggs that once the fox heard it, and came stealthily up at night and carried off a white brood hen from her nest and smashed the eggs. For the old cockerel

this was a great affliction, and after it the hens went about looking quite downhearted. And when the autumn wind shook the leaves from the trees, and the hens often had to scratch all day without finding a kernel of any thing to eat, they went to the cockerel and begged him to lead them back to the farm-yard. There they said it was true their eggs were taken away from them, but they had a warm roost and good food; here in the woods the fox broke their eggs and ate up themselves into the bargain.

The cockerel, who had himself privately begun to long for the heap of barley corns, agreed at once to go back, but advised the hens for the future to leave off cackling so as not always to betray where

the eggs were. But they were not disposed to be advised by him. They said that when they cackled they did it because they knew they had done a good thing; but that he often set up his nose without any reason; at least none of them had ever seen that he had laid an egg, and so he had nothing to say about the matter. Then the Cockerel was ashamed and held his tongue and led his family back to the farm-yard where they fell upon the heap of barley corns with a very keen appetite. There they live to this very day, and have the same sort of food, the same cackling and the same trouble.

THE DEAR MOTHER IN HEAVEN.



MAN once lived with his wife and child, happy and contented, for they loved each other, and God had given them every thing good and necessary. In the morning the man went out to work and the child remained with her mother at home and played, and her mother told her pretty stories, such as she liked to hear, and caressed her tenderly; or else she went with her into the garden, and the child gathered and ate the sweet strawberries and the finely flavored raspberries. And when the father came home

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THE CHILD AND HER SICK MOTHER.

at night they were all three happy because they were together. In this way they lived for some time till at last the mother became feeble and ill and had to go to bed. Then the father went sorrowfully to work in the morning, and was more sorrowful at evening when he saw that the sufferer grew no better. But the child remained with her mother, and when she was told that she might go alone to the garden she had no wish to go, but would hide her face on her mother's bed and weep. At last the mother felt that she must die, and called the child to her and said: "I shall soon go away from you, for our dear Father in Heaven is calling me to himself; but if you are good and kind I will come some

times to see you, my darling, and if it is God's will take you where I am in Heaven." Soon after the mother died and was buried in the garden, and the father was very unhappy and shed tears. The child was unhappy too, and would like to have gone to heaven with her mother, but as she hoped her mother would come to see her or take her to herself, she was soon consoled again. But her father was sorry for the child, because she would have to be alone while he went away to work, and so he married another wife to be the mother of the child. But she was a bad woman and did not love the child and did not speak to her, nor even look kindly at her. She took no care of the child, nor did she wash her

clothes nor mend them, and when she went to bed at night the new mother did not arrange her little bed for her. This made the child unhappy, and very often she went into the garden and sat down on her mother's grave, and said: "Ah, dear mother in Heaven, come and take me away." But when the bad woman saw the child sitting on the grave, she was angry and drove her away, for she could not bear that the child should think of the departed one, and she saw plainly that she had no love for her second mother. And when she saw the child eating strawberries and raspberries as she had been accustomed to do when her own mother was living, she beat her severely, for she would not let the child

have the berries, but wanted to eat them all herself. At last she became so bad to the child that she would not let her go into the garden at all, and when she went there herself she fastened the child up in a dark room. Then the child would break into loud lamentations and weep for she was afraid in the darkness. "Oh, mother, in Heaven," she said once, when she was shut up there, "Oh, come and take me away." Then a bright light came into the dark chamber, and her mother, in white robes beautiful and loving, just as she had been in life, only much more beautiful, took the child on her knee and kissed her and caressed her and told her stories just as she had used to do. But now they were stories of



THE MOTHER APPEARING TO THE CHILD.

Heaven, about the eternal gardens of paradise, where imperishable flowers bloom and flourish, where heavenly sweet fruits ripen, where the angel-children play joyous plays and dance the celestial dances, and sing their hymns before the throne of God our father. The child was happy to hear this, and became still and quiet and finally went to sleep. When the bad woman came from the garden and went into the chamber to fetch the child, she found her pale and asleep in one corner, and woke her up with hard and unkind words.

At evening the child told her father how her mother in heaven had been to see her, and what she had said to her. At this the father was thoughtful, and

though he told the child it was only a dream, it made him heavy hearted, for he loved his first wife much more than the second, and knew that the latter was not a good mother to his child. But as he did not know how bad she was, he was silent and said nothing about it. After that, whenever the child was shut up in the dark chamber, she was calm and quiet, for she did not stay long alone in the darkness. Her mother in Heaven came to see her with a soft, clear light, and comforted her and told her about Heaven and the Angels. Then the child grew more and more full of longing for the heavenly delights and begging her mother at every visit to take her with her, but the mother always said it was

not time yet and she must wait. And as the child grew paler and more silent, and often looked out of the window towards Heaven with folded hands, the bad woman was more unkind and hard to her and fastened her up oftener in the dark chamber. Once when she shut her up there and went to bring her out again from the darkness, the child looked much paler than usual, and when she called her, did not stir. Then she saw that she was dead. The mother in heaven had been with her and rocked her to sleep, and promised her that she should wake up in Heaven. And there the child has a robe of light like the angel-children with whom she plays in the gardens of God.

THE HORSE'S FOOTPRINT.



IN the dark Hartz mountains, just where the little stream called the Bode flows between the high hills, there stands a lofty and steep rock whose base is wet by the waters of the stream. This rock is called the Horse's Footprint, and its summit is covered with the most beautiful, great trees, such as oaks, beeches, and birches. On this rock there stood once, many hundred, hundred years ago, a splendid royal castle. In this castle there dwelt a king with his only daughter,

the beautiful princess Pimpinella. The princess had many suitors, for she was known far and wide as the most lovely of king's daughters, but she rejected all these aspirants for her favor, because she was in love with a shepherd who daily led his flocks down the hill by the castle. Among the suitors of the princess there was a great giant, a cruel magician with a most horrible fright in his looks, and of him the princess lived in constant fear, for she would not have him for a husband, and he had become very angry, and threatened her with the most terrible revenge if she should have any body else. But the princess persisted in her refusal, and so it happened, when she had wandered too far beyond the limits of the

domain belonging to the castle, in search of flowers, the wicked giant was lying in wait for her, and took her on his arm, and in spite of her cries for help, carried her violently down the mountain and stepped with her over the stream and carried her up the steep rocky shore on the other side where his strong castle was situated. There he kept the poor princess in close confinement through a whole long winter, and watched her day and night. But the shepherd, who had seen from a distance how the giant carried off the princess, was too weak to go to her assistance, but determined to see if he could set her free by stratagem. At last by spring he had contrived a way to do it. He tapped the young birch

trees, and from the sap which ran out of them he prepared a strong, sweet, intoxicating drink. With this he started for the castle of the giant. He found the monster lying before the gate of the tower, which led to the place where the princess was imprisoned, stretched out in the sun to warm himself. The shepherd offered him the drink; the giant thought it was excellent, and kept asking for more and more till at last he lost his senses and fell asleep. The shepherd made use of the moment to open the gate and lead the princess from the tower. In haste and silence they led the giant's horse from the stable and mounting it rode swiftly away. They soon came to the precipice, beneath which they saw

the Bode flowing, and on the opposite side the royal castle glittering in the sunshine. Then they thought they were safe, and dismounted from the horse, and began to dance for joy. But unfortunately the giant had been awakened by the hoofstrokes of the horse, which had echoed among the mountains like thunder, and was hastening after the fugitives. His long arm reached the clouds and rolled them together into a threatening storm, and his voice roared the most fearful threats against the terrified pair. What could they do in this extremity? Behind them was the pursuer, the cruel giant; before them the precipice and the foaming stream. But the princess was determined not again



ESCAPE OF THE PRINCESS.

to fall into the hands of the monster; she leaped once more upon the giant's horse, and the shepherd with her, and they urged him to a mighty spring so that he bore them safely across to the rocks on the other side. But at the moment when they were hanging over the abyss the princess was shaken on the horse and the golden crown fell into the water which rose up hissing to receive it. Then the royal castle on the rock instantly disappeared with a loud noise.

The princess and the shepherd were saved, but with the royal crown the castle had vanished and the kingdom was lost. The giant knew this and laughed scornfully on the opposite rock, so that the mountain quaked with the sound.

After this Pimpinella married the shepherd, and became a poor but happy shepherdess, and for a long time fed her flocks with him in contentment on the Hartz mountains. The giant changed himself into a great black dog, and kept watch beside the stream so that no one should attempt to recover the crown from the water. For whoever should draw the crown from the water was to be king, and the sunken royal castle would build itself up again on the cliffs. Many were attracted by this, and came and tried to get the crown, but they fished up nothing but shining golden trout, and when any one went there to try it at night, he was so fiercely set upon by the black dog, that he had to run away as quickly as

possible. Thus the king's crown lies there to this day in the water, and when the sun stands over the valley, or the full moon shines at night, it can be seen, gleaming, sparkling, and glowing in the stream, and some travellers, who have gone over the mountains in the night, declare that they have seen it as the water spirits were playing with it among the waves. For my part I cannot say whether this is really so or not, but it is certainly true, that whenever a youth or maiden shall come with a heart as pure as the waters of the Bode, and fish for the crown with joyous faith and humble heart, the dog will have no power over him, and the water spirits will cast the crown into his net, and he will be king,

and a glorious and happy time will begin for the poor dwellers in the dark Hartz mountains.

And if any one doubts this story, let him only go to the valley on the Bode, and climb to the place of the horse's leap and see the immense footprint which his mighty hoof made in the solid rock, and then look down into the stream and see how something glitters and shines in its waves.





THE INDIAN GIRL AND THE CROCODILE.

THE back of the crocodile is covered with hard scales, but its eyes and the skin of its throat are very tender, and the knowledge of this has saved the lives of many poor Indians and negroes. I will tell you how a young Indian girl

escaped from the jaws of a crocodile, by her courage and presence of mind. When she was seized by the monster, there was no one within reach to assist her; she was dreadfully hurt too, yet in the midst of her pain and alarm, she remembered what she had often been told, and tried to find the eyes of the crocodile; she put her fingers into them with such violence, that the pain obliged it to let her loose. It had bitten off part of her arm, but the poor girl contrived to reach the shore in safety, by swimming with the hand she still had left.

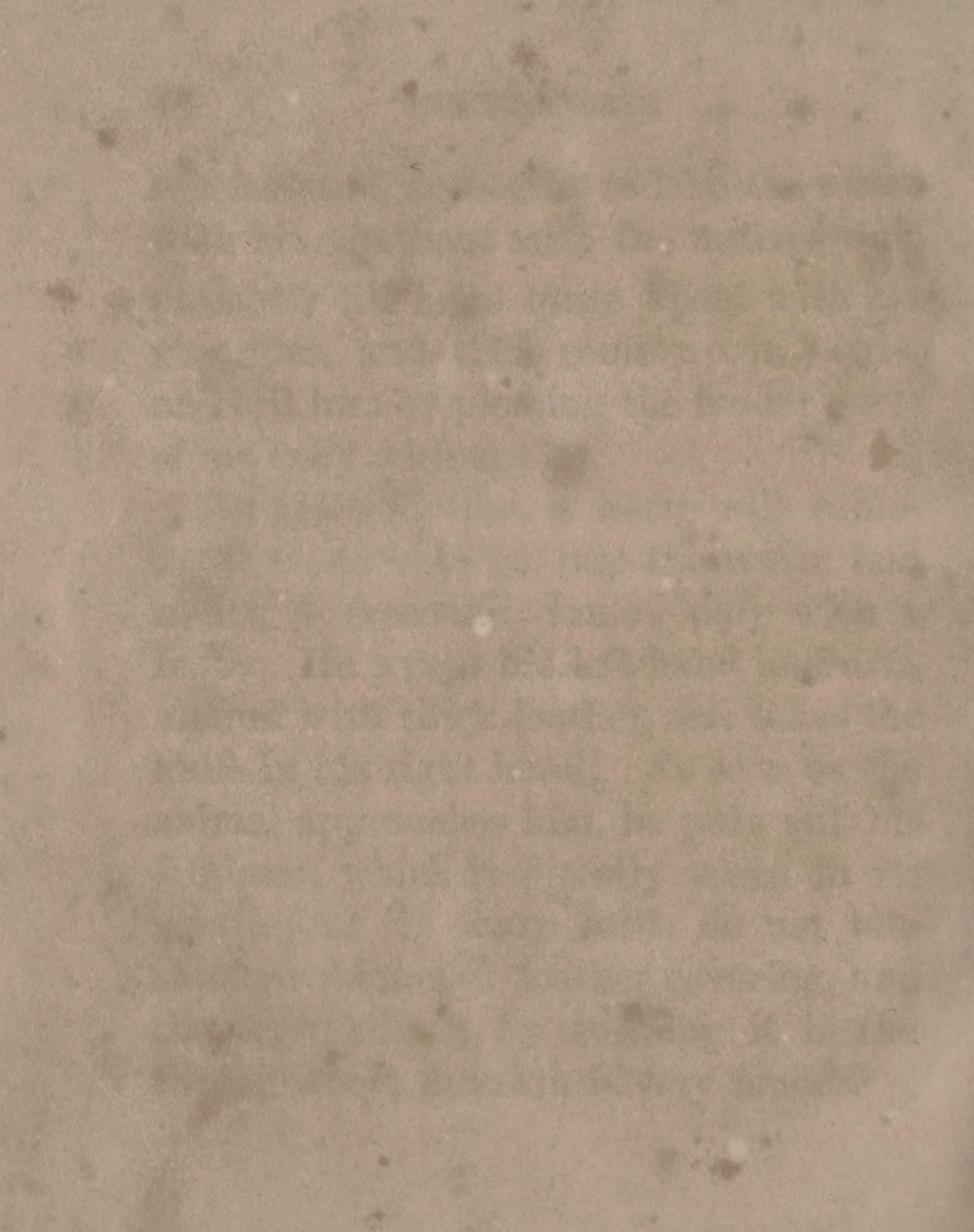
There are several ways of taking the crocodile. In some places they are hunted with dogs, which are trained for the purpose, and armed with spiked col-

lars. In the island of Java, they are sometimes caught with a hook fastened to a cord made of loosely twisted cotton. This sort of line is used by the Javanese, because, as soon as the crocodile has swallowed the hook, he tries to bite asunder the cord, and his teeth, instead of dividing the loose cotton rope, only pass between its fibres, and all the captive's attempts to bite it through are in vain. When once secured in this manner, he may be safely attacked and destroyed.

The natives of Siam take them in nets, by placing three or four across a river, so that if the crocodile should break through the first, he may be caught in one of the others. When he feels him-

self fastened, he begins to lash the water with his enormous tail; the natives wait patiently till he is quite spent with his struggles, and then come up in boats, and kill him by piercing the tender parts of his body with spears.

We are told that a negro will sometimes venture to go into the water and attack a crocodile, armed only with a knife. He wraps his left hand and arm around with thick leather, and takes the knife in his right hand. As soon as the animal approaches him, he puts out his left arm, which it directly seizes in its mouth, but its sharp teeth do not bite through the tough leather covering, and the negro kills it, by stabbing it in the throat, where the skin is very tender.



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